

**MCDOWELL SONORAN PRESERVE COMMISSION
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE ROOM
1st FLOOR, ONE CIVIC CENTER
7447 E. INDIAN SCHOOL ROAD
THURSDAY, APRIL 6, 2006
5:00PM**

MEETING MINUTES

PRESENT: Art DeCabooter, Chairman
Christina Kovach, Vice-chair
Carla
Erik Filsinger
Joan Fudala
Melinda Gulick (departed at 6:07 p.m.)
Gerry Miller
Arnold Roy
Linda Whitehead
Solange Whitehead

ABSENT: Virginia Korte

STAFF: Bob Cafarella, Preservation Director
Jim Ford, Deputy Fire Chief
Lieutenant Tony Gibson, Scottsdale Police Department
Lisa Gurtler, Financial Services
Don Meserve
Claire Miller, McDowell Sonoran Preserve Manager

ALSO PRESENT:
Bill Berkley
Tommy Collins
Dan Gruber
B.J. Heggli

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chairman DeCabooter called the meeting to order at 5:06 p.m., noting the presence of a quorum.

2. POSSIBLE ACTION: APPROVAL OF MARCH 2, 2006 MINUTES

Commissioner Linda Whitehead requested a change in the penultimate paragraph of the section regarding the possible bond fund transfer, on page 3 of the minutes. She had said that if the diversion of funds were to take place, the public would perceive this as a diversion. She requested that the sentence be changed to: "Opining that the public perception would be that this was a diversion of Preserve taxes, . . ."

Commissioner Carla asked that the first sentence of the third paragraph of Item 4 be amended to read " Commissioner Carla reminded the Commission that the process of creating the plan took eight months of research and extensive public outreach . . . "

It was noted that Dan Gruber should be identified as a guest on the list of attendees rather than as City of Scottsdale staff.

COMMISSIONER FUDALA MADE A MOTION TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE SEPTEMBER 1, 2005 MEETING. THE MOTION WAS SECONDED BY COMMISSIONER GULICK AND CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY BY A VOTE OF 9 (NINE) TO 0 (ZERO).

3. PRESENTATION/DISCUSSION/POSSIBLE ACTION: PUBLIC SAFETY IN THE PRESERVE

Deputy Fire Chief Jim Ford presented a review of activities and preparations for the upcoming fire season.

He noted that Commissioners Miller and Solange Whitehead have met with the Fire Department. The Department will take Commissioner Solange Whitehead's thoughts about a fire plan for the Preserve and revise the plan. Once updated, it will be reviewed annually.

Commissioner Miller's concern with invasive weeds is of great interest to the Fire Department, because these provide fuel for wildfires.

The Fire Department is aware that as the Preserve is increasingly used, emergency medical services will be used more frequently. It is important to identify the trails and to work out evacuation and access routes.

Deputy Chief Ford noted that six firefighters just completed advanced wildfire training in Prescott. These firefighters will in turn train other members of the Fire Department. Once that training is completed, they will be available to educate other groups such as homeowners associations, Preserve stewards, and City crews

Deputy Chief Ford outlined the Department's strategy for fighting wildfires. The Wildland Fire Support Group consists of trained certified City employees. The State is increasing the wildfire air support for the upcoming fire season. Scottsdale Airport will be used as a base for single-engine firefighting planes if extra aircraft need to be called in. Deputy Chief Ford shared the details of the recent fire, noting that the invasive weeds contributed to the fire. In the last ten years the Preserve has only been closed twice, because of extreme conditions. The Fire Department will confer with the impacted parties before making a decision to close the Preserve. Deputy Chief Ford stressed that these decisions are not taken lightly. Last year the Department had asked the State to coordinate control of the State land to the north. For this season the Fire Department is planning a more proactive approach.

Commissioner Carla distributed an update from the Planning Committee regarding invasive weeds. She noted that the ultimate goal is to work on eradication throughout the Preserve on the fuel weeds. It is also a goal to create a defensible space around the Preserve, even in developed areas. In true Sonoran Desert conditions, fires do not run

but instead burn themselves out. The problem is that in many places true Sonoran Desert conditions no longer exist.

Chairman DeCabooter noted that it is critical to work together on the noxious weeds issue. Carla replied that Commissioner Miller has worked hard. She asked Deputy Chief Ford whether the Fire Department has a gaiter (gurney on wheels) for emergency evacuations. He replied that they do not and have started working on the specs. Carla noted that in a past evacuation, the Fire Department borrowed this equipment from Rio Verde. Deputy Chief Ford undertook to provide cost information to the Commission.

In response to an inquiry by Commissioner Miller, Deputy Chief Ford stated that the Department is trying to work on partnerships with the Preserve and with homeowners associations and individual homeowners to establish defensible spaces. He noted that the large developments have been very helpful in clearing out overgrown areas. The City's Field Services Division is cooperating closely to ensure major north-south roadways are kept clear of fuel weeds. This year's pamphlet on creating defensible spaces is currently at the printer.

Commissioner Filsinger asked whether the Department has enforcement power as a last resort. Deputy Chief Ford said they would prefer to persuade people to comply and will be meeting with Code Enforcement. Code Enforcement can clean up a property and issue a lien against the property, whereas the Fire Department can issue citations as a last resort. To date Deputy Chief Ford noted he has never had to do this.

Commissioner Linda Whitehead asked about helicopter response time. Deputy Chief Ford said that if Scottsdale had its own helicopter response time could be even shorter. A discussion ensued on using ponds at golf courses as water sources for helicopters. Deputy Chief Ford explained the current situation and advised the Commission that he will be contacting local golf courses and other facilities and advising them that in an emergency helicopter pilots may use their ponds.

Commissioner Linda Whitehead noted that there are State lands to the North, East, West, and the Tonto National Forest to the Northeast. These areas need to be addressed.

On the topic of noxious weeds, Commissioner Linda Whitehead suggested creating incentives to encourage homeowners to remove decorative invasive plants.

Commissioner Roy asked Deputy Chief Ford about intergovernmental relations in emergency situations. He replied that he has no worries about that. They can call on aid from other parts of the Valley as needed.

Commissioner Solange Whitehead noted there is a huge difference in the usage of the State land. Deputy Chief Ford confirmed they are talking about possibly closing the State lands to motorized use.

Commissioner Miller asked how the decision is made regarding closure. Deputy Chief Ford described the different levels of risk and what actions would be taken at different times.

Commissioner Fudala inquired whether they attempt to contact landscaping companies, given that many north Scottsdale residents use landscapers. Deputy Chief Ford replied that this option was discussed at subcommittee meetings. When they visit the large HOAs they invite the landscapers to come so they can learn. He added that although the Fire Department has drawn up a list of approved plants, as yet they have not made a list of noxious weeds to distribute to residents and landscapers.

Commissioner Carla asked whether the Fire Department is working with Capital Project Management to ensure that new projects do not exacerbate the problem. When areas are reseeded after a project is completed, there is a risk that the wrong plants may be planted. Deputy Chief Ford replied that as yet they have not done this. Commissioner Carla opined that direction from the Fire Department might be most influential, adding that some of the worst areas are revegetation from City projects.

Commissioner Carla asked what plans the Fire Department has regarding fireworks this summer. Deputy Chief Ford reminded the Commission that individual fireworks are illegal in Arizona. Permits are required for professional fireworks displays. Even if a permit is issued, the Fire Department can stop the display if conditions are unsafe.

Commissioner Solange Whitehead requested clarification of level 4 fire alert. Deputy Chief Ford explained that level 4 involves single-digit humidity, high winds, and extended draught periods with no rain, and high fuel conditions. The State and the Southwestern Wildland Group issue red flag days.

Mr. Don Meserve inquired regarding the expected fire season. Deputy Chief Ford replied that the past dry winter may mean that the coming season is not as bad as last year's.

Commissioner Solange Whitehead asked whether the Fire Department clears dry vegetation from trailheads, roadways and medians. Deputy Chief Ford replied that this is the responsibility of the Parks and Recreation Division.

Commissioner Carla cautioned that it is illegal to remove any plants from the Preserve without permission. The Planning Committee has determined that an education process is needed to help the public understand the principles of correct removal.

Mr. Bob Cafarella, Preservation Director, noted that there is a need to close the loop between the Commission and the Fire and Police Departments. He suggested that at the next meeting it would be appropriate for the Commission to review the white paper and consider formally submitting it. A discussion ensued. Commissioner Carla requested that the Fire Department's Preserve Protection Plan be e-mailed to Commissioner members for reference.

Lieutenant Tony Gibson of the Police Department addressed the meeting. He is charged with establishing the new Parks Preserve program. This program is six to nine months away from implementation because the Police Department needs to hire more regular police officers. The first level of response is from the patrol officers in District 3.

Police and Fire are concerned to be able to respond within the Preserve. They have been working with Preserve staff and the City's GIS staff to identify access points and trails. The Police Department would never drive vehicles through the Preserve on

routine patrols. They plan to purchase ATVs but would not take them off the trails except in a life and death emergency situation. The Department is committed to preserving the environment.

In response to an inquiry by Commissioner Solange Whitehead, Lieutenant Gibson said that part of the policy and philosophy of the program will be a commitment to environmental protection. Training will be done without damage to the Preserve.

Commissioner Linda Whitehead was concerned about the renegade ATV users who have done extensive damage. She asked how control could be gained over this minority. Lieutenant Gibson acknowledged that this will be a challenge although there are things that can be done to mitigate the problem. Ms. Claire Miller, Preserve Manager, noted that staff have recently been working closely with the Police Department. They are planning to brief the officers on the trails and enforcement. Lieutenant Gibson noted that the Police Department is trying to be proactive.

Commissioner Miller recalled that three years ago when the route signs were erected, two areas in the north area were blocked off and no motorized vehicles whatsoever were permitted. He remarked that this could be easier to enforce than allowing motorized vehicles into the Preserve and trying to ensure that they stay on the trails and asked whether these rules can be enforced. Lieutenant Gibson replied that they can be. Noting that many infractions occur on the weekends, he inquired whether more patrol coverage will be available on weekends. Lieutenant Gibson confirmed that additional resources would be committed as appropriate.

Commissioner Carla introduced Mr. B.J. Heggli, head of the McDowell Sonoran Conservancy Steward mountain bike team. Lieutenant Gibson confirmed that regular police patrols will be on horseback, by foot or by bicycle. Motorized police vehicles will only come into the Preserve for specific problems. He added that motorized vehicles may be very useful on State land roads and to reach access points. Commissioner Carla commented this is great because a great deal of concern had been generated by a misinformed article. When the State land becomes Preserve, the Preserve rules and policies will apply. Lieutenant Gibson noted that there are service roads on the State lands, and the police ATVs will go there. Otherwise, he assured the Commission that there will never routinely be police ATVs in the Preserve.

Commissioner Carla asked whether consideration has been given to doing a press campaign when the Police patrols are set to start. Lieutenant Gibson replied that they plan to work with the Commission to announce this and educate the public.

Mr. Heggli commented that once the State Trust land becomes preserve there will be a phase-in period because bikers will ignore the signs. There may be a need for increased police presence initially until the message gets across.

4. UPDATE STATE LAND REFORM

Commissioner Carla reported that 208,000 signatures have been collected. The Legislature is not listening to the public and is pushing a competing bill. She suggested that people contact all members of the State Senate and tell them to please respect the citizens of Arizona and not place the spoiler bill on the same ballot as HDR 2485, Nelson's State Land Reform Bill.

5. UPDATE: GEOGRAPHIC NAMES IN THE PRESERVE

Mr. Meserve provided an update, noting that staff is now going through the process with the State Names Board. Three names on the southern end of the Preserve were submitted in December and will be voted on in their summer meeting. Staff are working on the next batch of names. Staff may request letters of support in some cases. He undertook to e-mail a sample letter and a list of the names in the second batch to Commissioners.

6. DISCUSSION/POSSIBLE ACTION: MAY 20 LOST DOG WASH OPENING CEREMONIES PLANNING

Mr. Cafarella announced that May 20th will mark the opening of the Lost Dog Wash Trailhead. Planned events include hikes, mountain biking and equestrian activities. Marshall Trimble will be the MC and a number of people will speak. Mr. Cafarella requested that suggestions be e-mailed to staff.

Vice-Chair Kovach inquired regarding how the opening will be publicized. Mr. Cafarella outlined plans.

6. DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Mr. Cafarella reported that the consultants Weddle and Nichols who were working on the Desert Discovery Center are finalizing their report. Mr. Cafarella suggested a joint meeting with the Tourism Development Commission.

7. PRESERVE MANAGER'S REPORT

Ms. Miller noted that the Meet and Greet was a successful event. The Trail contractor has completed the Bell Loop and the Bell Pass trails. The trails are not yet open although members of the public are already making some use of the new trails. The stewards will be working on another trail that will connect the Bell Loop to the Caucus Trail. Thanks were expressed to Mr. Dick Benson for his help in setting up meetings with the McDowell Mountain Ranch Homeowners Association.

Commissioner Solange Whitehead noted that a champion mountain biker had complimented the Preserve's southern trails on a website, saying that he uses them to train for world-class events.

Ms. Miller noted a number of volunteer projects on the calendar for April. That morning they had removed 14 giant bags of buffel grass.

Commissioner Miller noted that it is crucial to be talk with those responsible for weed removal to ensure that they do not inadvertently make the invasive weed problem worse.

Vice-Chair Kovach asked if there will be a discussion on the role of volunteers in the Preserve. Mr. Cafarella replied that this is on the agenda of the May meeting.

8. FUTURE EXECUTIVE SESSION FOR MCDOWELL SONORAN PRESERVE COMMISSION

COMMISSIONER FILSINGER MADE A MOTION FOR AN EXECUTIVE SESSION AT THE MAY 4, 2006 MEETING OF THE COMMISSION. COMMISSIONER MILLER SECONDED THE MOTION, WHICH CARRIED BY A VOTE OF EIGHT (8) TO ZERO (0).

9. COMMISSIONER'S COMMENTS AND PUBLIC COMMENTS

Commissioner Carla distributed information regarding the Second Annual Preservation Golf Tournament scheduled for June 2nd at Troon North.

No members of the public wished to address the Commission.

10. AGENDA ITEMS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS

Commissioner Carla requested a discussion regarding the invasive weeds report distributed at tonight's meeting. She noted that as new access areas are opened there needs to be discussion about reactivating the promotions committee and getting information out to explain appropriate use of the Preserve.

Commissioner Filsinger commented he would rather have separate discussions of the fire issue and the invasive weed issue.

Commissioner Miller reminded the meeting that a retreat session to update new commissioners on the access plan and other topics had been mentioned. Mr. Cafarella requested clarification and Chair DeCabooter confirmed that this would be for the entire Commission. Staff will set a date for this session.

11. ADJOURNMENT

With no further business to discuss, and no need for an executive session, the meeting adjourned at 6:34 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
A/V Tronics, Inc.